



SOCIAL CONFLICT OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS
IN ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE PRICE*:
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH



A thesis presented to the English Department,
the Faculty of Letters, Jember University
as one of the requirements to get
the award of Sarjana Sastera degree
in English

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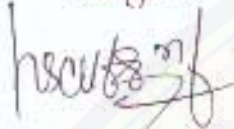
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APPROVAL SHEET

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Profoundly dedicated to:

- *My beloved parents for their endless support.*
- *My dearest husband to be for your happiness and being by my side every moment.*
- *My beloved uncle and untie, thanks for everything.*
- *My beloved younger sisters and younger brothers for their love and support.*

MOTTO:

*More Flies are Caught with a Drop of Honey than with a Ton of
Vinegar*

(Anonymous)

Man Proposes, God Disposes

(Anonymous)

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Rationale

Studying any form of literature is very interesting although it needs a specific knowledge to understand what literature means. It can enlarge our knowledge and experiences through the author's imagination whereas literary men certainly write their works with some purposes. They may write their works with the aim for giving us pleasure, information or criticism. By writing literary works, they try to present a certain view of life and its problem as they only express their imagination.

Literature is often defined as the mirror of society. Its explanation that is essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe, so what happens if it will be seen or described in literature. It is also assumed as the reflection of human life and society, and its position cannot be separated from the culture of society.

"Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. Literature represents life and 'life' is, in large measure, a social reality; eventhough the natural of world and the inner of subjective world of individual have also been objects of literary 'imitation'. Indeed, literature has usually arisen in close connection with particular social institution" (Wellek and Warren: 1956:94).

Drama is not different from the function of the other forms of literature; novel and poetry. Drama is more interesting to appreciate because it illustrates human life clearly. It is the illustration of the real phenomena of life it clearer than the other forms of literary works, the story is created specially to be performed on stage that makes us easier to understand. Drama is also as a means of communicating ideas, feelings, and emotions, through the words with several differences of convention of each term.

“ A drama as a form of literary work of literature or composition which delineates life and human activity by means of presenting various action or dialogues between a group of characters” (Reaske: 1966:5).

Arthur Miller is known as a social dramatist who is more interested in criticizing aspects of American society. Most of his works have theme concerning with the relationship between the individual and the society. Miller's perfect presentation in describing the real social condition of American, their problems and attitude, caused by economic depression can be seen easily from their social conflicts in *The Price*.

The Price is one of Arthur Miller's dramas, which is successfully produced in London, and the television production in the United States wins Emmy Awards. *The Price* seems to present the American condition in thirties, so it can be classified as a social drama. In this sense, it conceives society as an object, a mechanism whose works can be exposed by the process of theatre. Shaw's remarks that sociological play is narrative or dramatic work that deals primarily with social question and problem that focuses on social conflict of the main characters and personality of the main characters that create a social conflict between the main characters (1972:349).

This thesis discusses one of Arthur Miller plays entitled *The Price*. The play was written in a dramatic form focusing on Victor's family problems and their physical and psychological deterioration. The central problem upon which the interpretation of play turns is that of the character and relationship of Esther and Victor, who has a closed relationship with Walter and Solomon. The play develops their characters and relationship dramatically and realistically. Victor and Esther is a married couple who have serious problem in their finance, Walter as the young brother's of Victor try to help Victor and Esther but Victor has wrong perception to his brother. Victor still maintains his 'price' so he rejects Walter's help.

The author centralizes her study on social conflicts of the major characters in the play. Esther, the fictional character and Victor the suspicious character become the major focus to discuss concerning with their social conflict.

1.2 The Problems to Discuss

Arthur Miller describes the American economic depression is a source as of the people's conflict. The difficult situation at the time, such as small salary, unstable price, unemployment, made people compete with others to show that they should be strong enough to defend themselves. *The Price* written by Arthur miller shows the relation between human and social condition in which they interact one another. Supporting the idea, Miller himself explains that:

“It is a given assumption that all playwrights of any significance have something to say about man, the other half of the thematic equation changes. Thus many play address themselves to the nature of the relationship between man and society” (Reaske: 1966:82).

Conflict may happen when there is a dispute between one character with others, between a character and some elements in the world about her or between divergent impulses and value within herself. One of the conflicts that will be discussed in this thesis is social conflict of the major characters.

The Price is a play that reveals some conflicts from the major characters, especially Esther who gets social conflicts. She has several problems in her life, as the impact of the gradual movements and progress in their society. The social conflict is mainly caused by their different perception in facing the reality. In order to enlarge the understanding of the topic there will be a further discussion about the causes and effects of the social conflict, and how they solve their problems, the causes and the effects of the social conflict have close relation with the major characters of the play.

1.3 The Goals of Study

Through this analytical thesis, the writer considers that the social conflict is important to the development of the drama because social conflict as a combination of specific individual disabilities and the attitude of the society concerning its own responsibilities. By analyzing the major character's social conflict, the writer wants to reveal the major character's standpoints in facing the social conflicts with other characters around them.

The first goal is to make a deep analysis about Social Conflict of The Major Character in Arthur Miller's *The Price*. Therefore, it will be a contribution especially to study about the major social character conflict. The second purpose is to fulfill the requirements to get the award of Sarjana Sastra degree in English studies. The third is invaluable as a means of practicing English Language. The last, there is a hope, this thesis will be worthwhile for developing the knowledge and increasing the reader's interest on appreciating literary works.

1.4 The Scope of Study

The discussion of this thesis is limited on social conflict of the major characters and the personality of the characters that create a social conflict. The limitation aims to avoid the complicated discussion. The major characters are Victor, Esther, Walter and Solomon. This thesis also analyses the causes and the effects of this conflict, and the solution of the major characters to solve their problems.

1.5 The Approach to Use

The sociological approach is used in this thesis because this thesis will analyze the social conflict. The sociological critic therefore is interested in understanding the social milieu and extent to which manner in which the artist responds to it (Scott, 1962:123). This statement makes clear that the person who has lived in a certain society has to make a relation with other person who has live in a certain society. The relation here is not only as an artist but also as a human being. If two men meet, the social interaction starts or even fight begins

for his own interest (Sockanto, 1977:92). It is clear that in the society the people always interact with each other. This interaction can be shown through the dialogues and the actions in real life or in literary works as well. This interaction is also able to create the conflict between each other.

1.6 The Method of Analysis

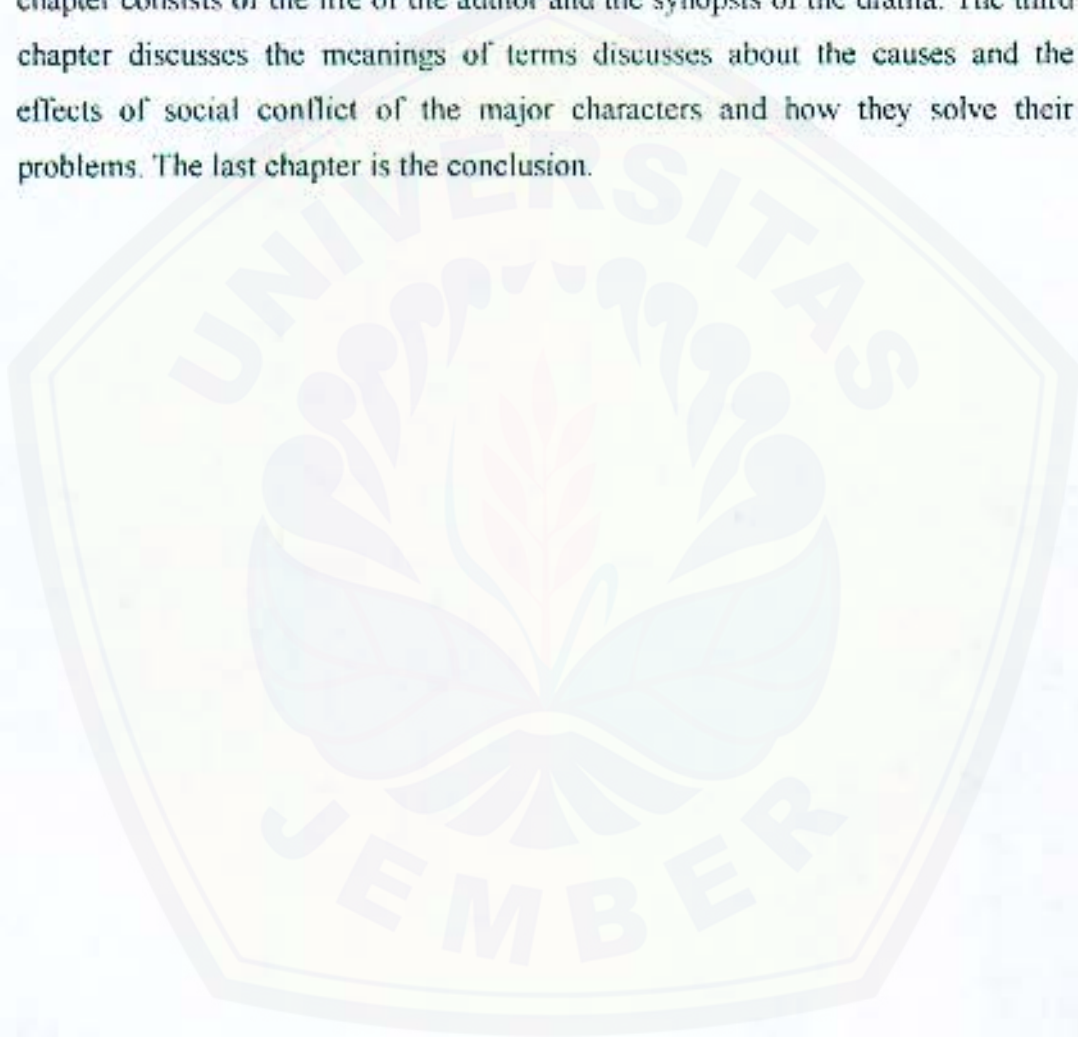
In writing this thesis, the deductive method is used. It is used to prove whether the conflicts of the major characters called as a social conflict. The deductive method is used because the conclusion gotten from general statement into specific one (Sutrisno, 1987:40). It means that the general statement is taken from some theories that support these analysis. On the other hand, the specific one is taken from some evidence to prove and support.

“Social conflict means the struggle of one person against another: two women seeking to marry the same man, two men competing for a job a child being conflict with his parents. Psychological or internal conflict means man is struggling against himself, his conscience, his guilt, there is an honest but poor bank employee fighting the temptation to steal from his bank, a woman struggling with the consequences of a lie she has told” (Jones, 1961:30-31).

The social conflicts between Victor and Esther, Victor and Walter, Esther and Solomon assumed as a social conflict. This assumption needs some evidence to prove and support it. The reasons someone bear a conflict. The personality of individual can create the social conflict. The causes of the conflict between man and man. The effects of the conflict for them. The way they solve their problems. The library research is used to gain some data, some sources of information about the content of this thesis, besides library data and information are collected from dictionaries and Internet.

1.7 The Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is introduction consists of the rationale, the problem to discuss, the scope of study, the approach to use, the method of analysis, and the organization of the thesis. The second chapter consists of the life of the author and the synopsis of the drama. The third chapter discusses the meanings of terms discusses about the causes and the effects of social conflict of the major characters and how they solve their problems. The last chapter is the conclusion.





CHAPTER II

THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR AND THE SYNOPSIS OF ARTHUR MILLER'S *THE PRICE*

2.1 The Biography of Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller, one of the American dramatists, was born in Manhattan, New York on October 17, 1915. He came from the middle class family. His father was Augusta Barnett Miller and his mother was Isadora. He lived at the same era as Tennessee William. Miller was son of a Jewish manufacturer who had come to this city as a small boy from Austria. In 1929, his father's business failed because of the economic depression. Thus, they had to move to Brooklyn, New York. Arthur Miller then had to work at a various jobs around New York including work as a farm hand and in a Tenth Avenue Warehouse for two and a half years to pay for his tuition fee to the University of Michigan. Through this job, he learned about the life of the simple man who is the subject of most of Arthur Miller's plays (Roberths, 1964: 5).

He entered the University of Michigan as a student of journalism and then switched to English, when he was about nineteen years old. At the young age, he began to write some plays. His first play was *Honor at Dawn* (1937) and it won Avery Hopwood Award in Drama University of Michigan. His next play which won the same prize were *The Grass Still Grow* (1936), *No Villain* (1936) and the Theatre Guild Bureau of New Play Award for *They Too Arise* which told about his description of a Darwinian struggle for survival in New York in 1930. After graduation in 1938, Miller returned to New York and a succession of writing jobs, briefly with the Federal Theatre Project, then with CBS and NBC radio workshop (Block, 1962: 1018). In 1940, after getting a BA degree in hand, he married Marry Grace Slattery, his Michigan classmate.

Situational Normal, a forthright diary form report was produced in 1944. It was written during his experiences in visiting army camps in World War II. His next play was *The Man Who Had All Luck* (1944) won a theatre Guild National

next play was *The Man Who Had All Luck* (1944) won a theatre Guild National Award in which he observed the midwestern small town manner. In the following year, his only novel, *Focus* (1945) was produced. It was the campaigning against an uncharitable social order, that deprives honest workers of constructive labor, then discards who is no longer useful (Moss, 1980: preface). His following play was *All My Son* about a factory owner who sells faulty aircraft parts during World War II, began presented in 1947. It was a box office success, which won the Drama Critic Award as the best play of the season.

In writing plays, Arthur Miller chiefly writes themes concerning with the relationship between the individual and the society. Some of his plays criticize the aspect of American society. He seriously talks about the problems dealing with the conflict between the individual enabling vision of personal integrity may be pitted against human weakness, and outside pressure, either social, political or economic (*Encyclopedia Americana*, 1974: 117). As the proof, it can be seen through his masterpiece entitled *Death of a Salesman* (1949). It is about the common man and his problem in his life. His life is neglected by the society, which has drained his energy in order to support his family to live in modern city. This play includes Miller's impressive and successful play. He won the Theatre Club Award, and The New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize (Biggsby, 1984: 186). In this play, he not only placed on trial moral values of his central character, Willy Loman, but also the society that by competition compels its individuals to neglect the native talents in favour of achieving material success, at the price of human dignity (Gould, 1966: 252). This means that Willy Loman cannot fulfill his family's demand on things. According to the American modern society at the time, success can be shown in richness and Willy Loman, who firstly believes that he will be successful in his business, cannot make his dream come true because he only counts on his performance, not on the skill on selling.

Having produced the play, *Death of a Salesman*, he wrote the other play entitled *The Crucible* (1953). This play retells the story of the Salem Witch-

Hunts. It was also his successful play and won both the Antoniette Perry Award and Donaldson Award.

His other play, *A View from the Bridge* (1955) which got the Pulitzer Prize, was one of his short plays with the subject of two longshoremen coming illegally into Brooklyn Water Front America through friends and relatives. In the same years, he also produced his other short play entitled *A Memory of Two Mondays*. It was inspire by his experiences while working in the warehouse in New York.

Besides his successful plays previously mentioned, Arthur Miller had also written *The Misfits* (1961), and *After the Fall* (1964), is an autobiography of his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, his other literary works are *Incident at Vichy* (1965), the short stories collection entitled *I Don't Need You Anymore* (1967). *The Price* (1968) tells about the meeting of two brothers who have not called for about sixteen years, to dispose of family's furniture which is inherited from their father because his life is not good as his old brother's, the young brother's accuses his old brother for victimizing his life during the time of economic depression. It also describe about money orientation where a wife demands her husband to get much money to support their living.

As a dramatist, Arthur Miller effectively uses the drama as a media to represent what he thinks and feels about something to the audiences. He attempted to communicate and deliver the message to the audiences through his works. It is reasonable for some critics to regard Miller as a social dramatist with a message. His existence as a dramatist is proved by his works mostly delineate the fate of the common man.

2.2 The Synopsis of Arthur Miller's *The Price*

Victor's family lives in New York at the time of great trouble of economic depression. His room is progressively seen, there is a rich heaviness, something almost Germanic showing the trend of his parents life in modern era. Victor Franz was a police sergeant who already has a retired. He plans to sell his heritage to Gregory Solomon, a clever businessman, in order to give his wife

relaxation, Esther Franz, who always feels depressed by those whole things. When Victor says that he will sell this furniture, she looks very happy and agrees with him even though she actually hates an empty room. It is sorry for the furniture, which is such kind of beautiful and expensive things.

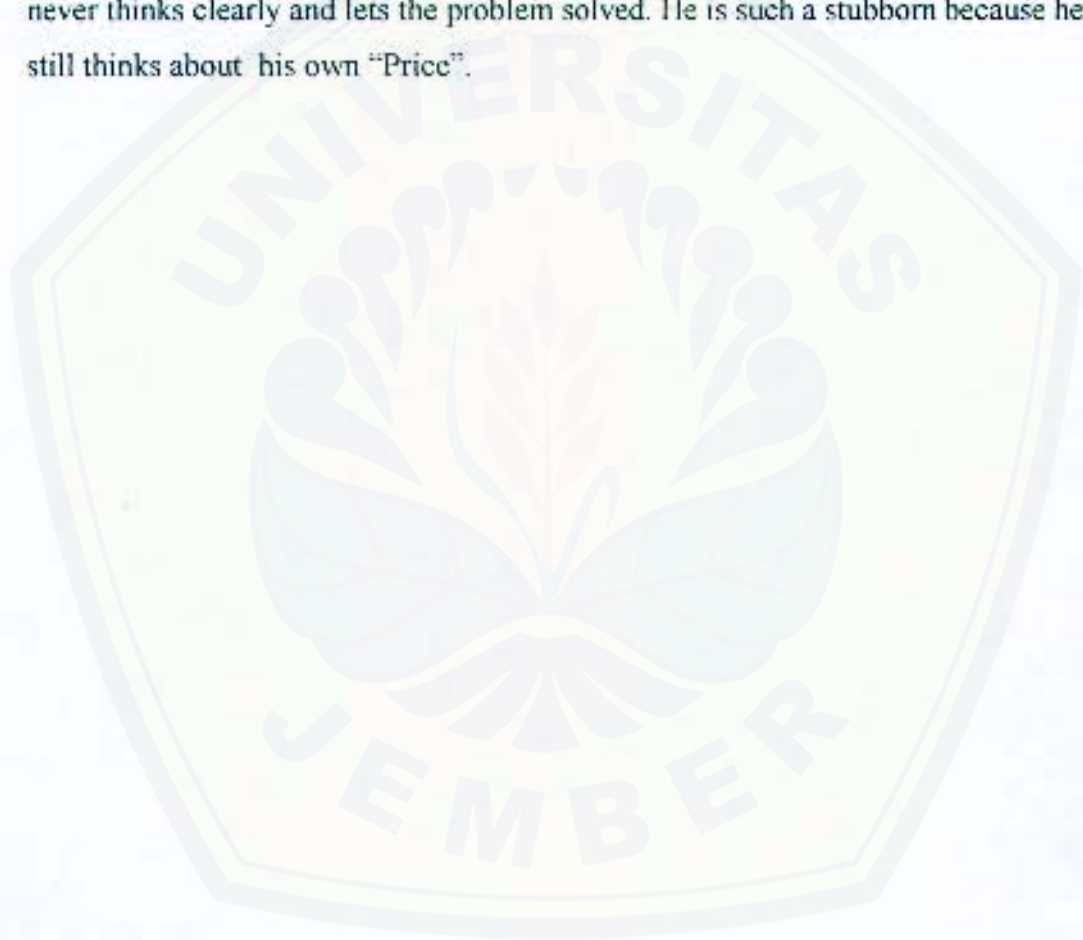
Meanwhile, Esther does not like her husband's profession, which only gets small salary. She does not want to see her husband going in police uniform. The depression period influenced and changed Esther's ideology especially in money orientation. She forces her husband to find a new job because she thinks a new job will give them much money than his profession before. Esther suggests him it will be better if Victor makes a good relationship with his brother, Walter Franz, just for getting his help. It is such a kind of a difficult thing for Victor to start a meeting with Walter. However, to sell the furniture he has to discuss it with Walter who has not called him for sixteen years. It seems the trouble for Victor to sell it. One day, Walter comes to his brother's house, Victor Franz, for making his relationship normal and in a good condition. Unfortunately, Victor thinks differently, he is sure that Walter's coming just to have half of that furniture. Actually, it was wrong because Walter himself is rich enough.

Walter tries to explain what he really wants but Victor does not care about it. Walter also offers him to get a new job as analytic chemistry of Walter's committee but he rejects it. Besides, he also worries about the condition of Victor's family because as far as he knows in 1936 it was difficult to get a job without money and skill. As it is supposed by Esther, she makes a good decision to support the idea of Walter and she blames her husband who is a stubborn man. There is a regret on Walter's face hearing that Victor will sell the furniture to Solomon who is buying it in lower price.

This conflict between the two brothers become more serious when Walter tells about their father who had invested money about four thousand dollars. Yet, Walter never told him so it is the reason of him to blame Walter. Even he believes that Walter does not give him the money because Walter does not want to. Esther is involved in this conflict by giving suggestion to Victor that Walter has been perfectly clear, he is asking Victor's friendship, even though this

suggestion has another aim. Victor even accuses Walter that he offers him a job and twelve dollars in order to stab him. He thinks that his brother, Walter, had abandoned his filial responsibilities.

At the end of the story, Walter does not have another way to give an explanation about the truth. Victor himself is still on his decision that there is nothing to give and accept between them. Therefore, he goes out and Victor lets him go. Knowing conflict between that two brothes Esther blames Victor who never thinks clearly and lets the problem solved. He is such a stubborn because he still thinks about his own "Price".



He says nobody will be interested in buying the furniture and it will be difficult to sell the furniture again. Solomon always bothers their conversation because Solomon thinks it does not make him get advantages from the furniture.

The effect of this problem, they are still walking in their own way. Victor still works as a police sergeant. The relationship between Walter and Victor is still uncomfortable because Victor still cannot forgive Walter. Esther cannot make her dream come true because the price of the furniture is not as she wants. The last Victor and Esther still sell the furniture to Solomon because they really need much money.

However Walter hates Solomon, he lets Victor and Esther sell the furniture. Walter really knows that the money is very important thing for them. Esther and Victor unsatisfy with the price of the furniture because the price is too low. But they do not have chance, so they sell the furniture to Solomon and Solomon feels so happy because finally he can get what he wants.



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